

## **News Release**

**Release Date: For Immediate Release**

**Date: June 26, 2012**

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### **HYDE COUNTY YOUTH AWARDED STATEWIDE YOUTH ADVOCATE AWARD**

Hyde County youth, Elaya Johnson, Molly Lovejoy, Katie O'Neal, and Emmet Temple are among the last group of youth in North Carolina to receive the Tobacco.Reality.Unfiltered. (TRU) Youth Advocate Certificate, a statewide award recognizing youth advocacy achievement in teen tobacco use prevention. The certificate is provided by the TRU program and signed by Governor Beverly Perdue.

Youth who receive this certificate have completed a series of required tasks including: participation in at least four youth empowerment trainings; implementation of a teen tobacco prevention presentation or activity in their school or community; and perform at least ten hours of relevant community service.

"I am inspired by these young leaders," said Wesley Smith, Hyde County Health Director. "It is important to recognize the contributions these youth have made to the health of our community by educating their peers and community about the dangers of tobacco use and encouraging them to remain tobacco free or to quit."

"Elaya Johnson worked for three years to receive this recognition," stated Lisa Phillips the Youth Tobacco Prevention Coordinator in Hyde County. "She participated in the Regional TRU Youth Conference and other trainings, demonstrated leadership skills during school and community events, and recruited her peers to join the TRU Club at Mattamuskeet High School."

TRU is a statewide initiative to prevent tobacco use among teens and has been influential in the consistent drop in tobacco use rates among youth. In 2011 NC reach an historic low for teen cigarette smoking. High school smoking rates lowered to 15.5 percent in 2011 from 16.7 percent in 2009.

"It was no small undertaking for these students to meet the requirements of becoming certified," said Gwen Austin, Ocracoke School Adult Leader. "I am especially proud of Katie, Molly and Emmet's enthusiasm to participate in youth empowerment trainings and to provide leadership for the Ocracoke Community Health Fair that took place for three years."

Other activities undertaken by these youth advocates include; presentations to the Hyde County Board of Commissioners and Hyde County Board of Education, hosting appearances with SAVE speakers Reena Roberts and Kristy Andrew at both Ocracoke School and Mattamuskeet High School, educating people at basketball games, and making QUIT kits for doctors offices.

“In working toward this statewide certification, I learned a tremendous amount about the type of leadership necessary to advocate for the TRU movement,” said one of the youth “it feels really good to volunteer and be involved with school and community activities.” For more information about TRU in Hyde, Dare, and Currituck County contact Lisa Phillips at 252-475-5077.

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(Elaya TRU YAC)

TRU Youth Advocates for 2012 from Ocracoke School include; Katie O’Neal, Emmet Temple and Molly Lovejoy, with SAVE Speaker Kristy Andrews and Adult Leader Gwen Austin.

(GROUP SHOT)

TRU Youth Advocate for 2012, Elaya Johnson, from Mattamuskeet High School is shown here with TRU Youth advisor Elbert Maynard and former TRU Youth Advisor Kelly Fox.